

CHAPTER XVII
THE STRATEGIC CENTRE OF
THE WORLD

Not only had the warring Powers reached an impasse in the Mediterranean, but the whole world is inextricably involved in this great waterway and the trade routes from Europe to Asia. As has been indicated, the history of Europe has revolved in great part about the struggle for this territory and the trade routes to the Orient. Empire after empire, and conqueror after conqueror have struggled for its possession. Darius, Cyrus, Xerxes, Alexander the Great, Mark Antony, Trajan, Aurelian fought for the control of this part of the world. The wars of Rome and Carthage had their origin in the struggle for Mediterranean supremacy. The Italian cities fought for the trade of the Orient, from which they derived their wealth. Napoleon was drawn to Egypt to plant the flag of France at the connecting

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link of Europe and Asia. Russia and England manœuvred for years over the control of the same territory. The Crimean War was a war for the control of Turkey and western Asia. The long hostility of England and France, culminating in the Fashoda incident, had its origin in this part of the world. For a quarter of a century all the Allied Powers have been in a state of apprehension; they have utilized diplomacy, finance, and force to prevent the empire of Germany, with the aid of science, engineering, railroads, and finance, from occupying Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, and the trade routes from Europe to India.

The Mediterranean is an extension of the British Channel. Mesopotamia is an extension of *Mittleuropa*. Here billions of investments, billions of commerce, billions of shipping are in collision. The imperialistic ambitions of five great nations are involved, as is the political and economic life of a score of other races and peoples.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as has been recalled, the control of this territory passed into the hands of the Turks. The trade route to the Orient was interrupted. States

and cities fell to decay. This interruption of the economic life of Europe revolutionized society. It shifted trade, commerce, and wealth to the West. The discovery of a sea route to India around the lower end of Africa, and the rise of the Atlantic states to power ended the supremacy of the Mediterranean. It ceased to be the centre of the world. The trade to the East abandoned the old courses for the safer routes around the Cape of Good Hope. Within a short time England took to the seas, while continental Europe from Vienna to the Netherlands gradually decayed.

Such was the importance of the Mediterranean in mediæval times. How much more important is this trade route to-day when all the world is interdependent, and the trade involved and the interests affected run into many billions of dollars. For the foreign commerce of the states bordering on the Mediterranean amounts (1914) to \$2,500,000,000, while, with Russia and Austria-Hungary added, it amounts to \$5,000,000,000.¹ The trade through the Suez Canal amounts to \$1,600,000,000 more.

¹ A large part of the commerce and foreign trade of Russia and Austria-Hungary passes through other channels.

Not only is the economic life of Europe involved in the Mediterranean, but the relations of Asia to the western world are controlled by it. So are the relations of Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, and the east coast of Africa. For control of the Mediterranean involves potential control over the Far East. It determines the alliances of nations as well as their economic connections.

The states about the Mediterranean are even more vitally affected by the disposition of this vast territory. And these states contain 108,000,000 people. With Russia and Austria-Hungary added, they contain 340,000,000. Twenty separate nations or peoples live about this waterway, and enjoy access and contact with the world through its channels to the seas. Their industrial life, their trade, and their commerce is dependent upon it. The economic life of practically all of Europe, Asia, and Africa is in fact interlaced with the Mediterranean. Its importance is far greater than it was in ancient and mediæval times, when the world centred about the valleys of Mesopotamia and the "Royal Road" to the Orient. For the Mediterranean is the connecting link

of Europe and Asia. It is the umbilical cord of the world.

The control of this waterway and the territories round about it by any Power or group of Powers is a menace to the security of the world. It is a menace to the unity of empires and the alliances of states. It affects the psychology of the states round about it. Russia, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, Italy, and Greece, as well as Serbia, Roumania, Bulgaria, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, and western Asia, are affected by their fear of subjection—either economic or political—to another Power. For they are only permitted to reach the outside world with the assent of some other nation. They cannot develop freely. This may seem a matter of small importance, but it is only so to the greater Powers. To the states affected, each as eager for complete freedom as any of the greater nations, the control of the Mediterranean by any Power awakens their fears. And the Mediterranean states do not feel free. Moreover, the greater nations are engaged in a struggle to increase their control as a means of protection to empire, as a guarantee of security to their trade, and as a means of up-

building their economic life. This is perfectly obvious in the case of Russia. From the time of Peter the Great she has been seeking access to the seas. One war after another has been fought for this purpose. This has been the consuming ambition of Russian statecraft. The will of Peter the Great is said to contain the following passage: "I recommend all my successors to realize this truth, that the trade of the Indies is the trade of the world, and whoever is able to control it exclusively will be the real sovereign of Europe. In consequence, we should never miss any opportunity of exciting wars in Persia, to hasten the disintegration of that country, to penetrate to the Persian Gulf, and to attempt then to re-establish the ancient commerce of the Levant through Syria."¹

Russia is dependent upon the outside world for her economic existence. If the Dardanelles and the Baltic are closed against her; if the Mediterranean remains a closed sea, she is unable to freely exchange her products with the outside world. The development of Russia is dependent upon the freedom of the

¹ *German Road to the East*, Evans Lewin, p. 42.

Dardanelles and the Mediterranean. The same is true of Austria-Hungary; it is true of the other states as well.

Our own psychology is only less touchy than that of England, Germany, and Russia. We, too, have been guided in our foreign policy by the fear that some European Power might gain a foothold in the Americas. The Monroe Doctrine is the American equivalent of the British control of the Mediterranean. We are apprehensive about the West Indies and the Philippines; we are apprehensive that some other Power may menace the Panama Canal or build another canal across the Isthmus. Nationalistic psychology baffles reason. It is much the same in all countries. It keeps Anglo-Saxon, Teuton, Slav, and Latin in a state of fear. And were some other nation as powerful as our own to control the entrance to New York harbor; were the Panama Canal under the guns of some foreign fortress; were San Francisco subject to blockade in case of war; no friendly assurance would suffice to suppress the demand for a huge naval establishment, and possibly a trial of strength to free ourselves from the danger of having the waterways

of the world closed against us. In nations as in peoples there is a psychology that instinctively insists upon the right of contact with the outside world. We have been ready to go to war for the protection of our waterways. In 1900, at the time of the Venezuela incident, when the Kaiser informed President Roosevelt of his intention to send a fleet to Venezuela, the American fleet was ordered to be in readiness to proceed to Caribbean waters. The German ambassador was advised of this fact, and informed that the Venezuela question must be submitted to arbitration. German intervention in Venezuela was not only a defiance of the Monroe Doctrine, it was a menace to the Panama Canal.

That this is the psychology of England, Austria-Hungary, and Russia there is no doubt. For Austria-Hungary is situated as is Russia. She, too, desires free and unmenaced access to the seas. Not only through the Danube and Trieste, but through the Atlantic and Indian Oceans as well. Austria-Hungary is struggling for Salonika and control of the Adriatic as Germany is struggling for the Persian Gulf. These are the great objectives of

these two Powers. Austria-Hungary has built up a substantial merchant marine. She has developed a large foreign trade. But her sea-ports are under the potential menace of Italy and Great Britain. That these states have not used their power in peace times to suppress Austro-Hungarian commerce, or to interfere with her trade with the world, in no wise relieves the mind of the nation or the apprehension of the commercial classes, who invest their money in industry and shipping that may be placed in peril by the action of another Power. Italy and the Balkan states are in the same position. They too are in constant fear for their sea connections and access to the outside world.

France, too, is far from self-contained. And her life is centred in the Mediterranean. French investments in Russia amount to probably \$3,000,000,000. In Turkey and the Balkan states they amount to \$1,200,000,000 more. Her trade is largely with the Near-Eastern countries, into which the savings of her peasants have gone to the extent of billions of dollars.

This is why the Mediterranean is the heart

of the war. The old nationalism of Bismarck came to an end with the last century. Internationalism has taken its place; an internationalism that is economic, industrial, financial. The whole world is interlocked. And the Mediterranean basin is the strategic centre of three continents. It controls international relations almost as completely as it did for centuries before the Christian era when one empire after another fought for its control. That the eyes of the world are centred on the trenches of Flanders in no wise alters the fact that the chancelleries of Europe are consciously or unconsciously concerned over the control of this part of the world, and especially of the waterways and land routes, the harbors and strategic points, and the imperial questions that are inextricably merged with this vast territory. The Mediterranean remains the nexus of the Occident and the Orient, as it was in the days of the Assyrians and the Persians, of the Greeks and the Romans, of the Italian cities, and the south European towns in the latter Middle Ages. Its control will determine the future of the world far more completely than the control of western Europe.